

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OMB-01 EB-08 TRSE-00 CIAE-00
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COME-00 FRB-03 STR-04 LAB-04 SIL-01 /085 W
-----211815Z 048209 /46

R 211613Z APR 77

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9637
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY LISBON
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, BE

SUBJECT: BELGIAN ELECTIONS: THE WINNERS AND THE LOSERS

REF: (A) BRUSSELS 3869, (B) BRUSSELS 3815

SUMMARY: LEO TINDEMANS EMERGEED FROM SUNDAY'S NATIONAL
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ELECTIONS THE MOST POPULAR POLITICIAN IN MODERN BELGIAN
HISTORY, AMASSING AN UNPRECEDENTED NUMBER OF PREFERENCE
VOTES. ANOTHER STRIKING PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT WAS THE
LARGE VOTE TOTAL OF ECONOMIST MARC EYSKENS, SON OF A
FORMER PRIME MINISTER, MAKING HIS FIRST RUN FOR PUBLIC
OFFICE. IN THE PRESTIGE SWEEPSTAKES, THE BIG LOSER
WAS FINANCE MINISTER WILLY DECLERCQ, RE-ELECTED BUT

WITH A STEEP DECLINE IN PREFERENCE VOTES. END SUMMARY.

1. LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS IN BELGIUM ARE ESSENTIALLY CONTESTS BETWEEN POLITICAL PARTIES, WHICH OBTAIN SEATS IN PARLIAMENT IN PROPORTION TO THE NUMBER OF VOTES EACH POLLS. BUT THE BELGIAN ELECTORAL SYSTEM PERMITS VOTERS TO SINGLE OUT FOR APPROVAL INDIVIDUAL POLITICIANS WHOSE NAMES APPEAR ON THE PARTY LISTS OF CANDIDATES FOR HOUSE OR SENATE IN EACH VOTING DISTRICT (ARRONDISSEMENT). EACH VOTER HAS THE OPTION OF CASTING HIS ONE VOTE FOR A PARTY LIST AS A WHOLE OR OF VOTING FOR ONE SPECIFIC CANDIDATE ON A LIST. (HIS VOTE FOR A SPECIFIC CANDIDATE IS ALSO A VOTE FOR THAT CANDIDATE'S PARTY.)

2. TYPICALLY ABOUT HALF THE VOTERS IN AN ARRONDISSEMENT WILL VOTE A PARTY LIST AND THE OTHER HALF CAST PREFERENCE VOTES. WITH FIVE OR SIX CANDIDATES ON A TYPICAL ARRONDISSEMENT PARTY LIST, A THEORETICALLY AVERAGE CANDIDATE WOULD GARNER ABOUT TEN PERCENT OF ALL VOTES CAST FOR HIS PARTY. IN THE ANTWERP ARRONDISSEMENT SUNDAY TINDEMANS RECEIVED 134,163 PREFERENCE VOTES- ONE-QUARTER OF ALL VOTES CAST IN ANTWERP AND 57 PERCENT OF ALL VOTES CAST FOR THE CHRISTIAN PEOPLES PARTY (CVP). THIS IS THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF PREFERENCE VOTES, IN BOTH ABSOLUTE AND PROPORTIONAL TERMS, EVER ACCORDED ONE CANDIDATE IN BELGIUM. THAT PERSONAL ENDORSEMENT RENDERS TINDEMANS UNASSAILABLE AT THE HEAD OF HIS PARTY AND ALL BUT UNAVOIDABLE AS THE HEAD OF THE NEXT BELGIAN GOVERNMENT.
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3. THE SECOND STRIKING CVP WINNER WAS MARC EYSKENS, THE LOUVAIN ECONOMICS PROFESSOR WHO ENTERED TINDEMANS CABINET AS A JUNIOR MINISTER LAST WINTER. RUNNING FOR OFFICE FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE SON OF A FORMER PRIME MINISTER GASTON EYSKENS WON MORE THAN HALF (30,216) OF THE PREFERENCE VOTES CAST FOR CVP CANDIDATES IN HIS LOUVAIN DISTRICT. HE BECAMES A HEAVY FAVORITE TO JOIN TINDEMANS NEW CABINET.

4. THE BIG LOSER IN PREFERENCE SWEEPSTAKES WAS FINANCE MINISTER WILLY DECLERCQ, HEAD OF THE LIBERAL PARTY IN GHENT. OSTENSIBLY THE SECOND MOST POPULAR POLITICIAN IN BELGIUM, ACCORDING TO RECENT OPINION POLLS, DECLERCQ LOST ONE-THIRD OF THE PREFERENCE VOTES HE GARNERED IN 1974. IN GHENT HE RAN SECOND IN PREFERENCE VOTES TO CVP PARTY PRESIDENT WILFRIED MARTENS - 44,568 TO 38,603. AN APRIL 1 TAX INCREASE ASSOCIATED WITH THE FINANCE MINISTER AND A CORRUPTION SCANDAL INVOLVING

GHENT LIBERALS (NOT INCLUDING DECLERCQ) CERTAINLY
CONTRIBUTED TO DECLERCQ'S FALL FROM POPULAR FAVOR.

5. ONLY ONE CABINET MINISTER, ANDRE KEMPINAIRE, A
FLEMISH LIBERAL, FAILED OF RE-ELECTION TO PARLIAMENT.
BUT OTHER PROMINENT MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT SUFFERED
PRESTIGE LOSSES. AMONG THEM: SOCIALIST PARTY
CO-PRESIDENT WILLY CLAES AND FORMER EC COMMISSIONER
HENRI SIMONET, WHO HAD BEEN TOUTED AS THE SOCIALIST
POLITICIAN MOST LIKELY TO BE TAPPED TO FORM A GOVERNMENT.
BOTH CLAES AND SIMONET REGISTERED DISAPPOINTING DECLINES
IN PREFERENCE VOTES IN THEIR HOME DISTRICTS.

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6. AMONG NATIONAL FIGURES WHO REGISTERED PERSONAL SUCCESSES WERE RIKA DE BACKER, CVP MINISTER OF DUTCH CULTURE, RE-ELECTED TO THE SENATE FROM ANTWERP; ANDRE COOLS, FRANCOPHONE CO-PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY, RE-ELECTED TO THE HOUSE FROM LIEGE; HUGO SCHILTZ, PRESIDENT OF THE VOLKSUNIE PARTY, RE-ELECTED TO THE HOUSE FROM ANTWERP; FRANCK VAN ACKER, SON OF THE FORMER LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SOCIALIST PRIME MINISTER, RE-ELECTED TO THE HOUSE FROM BRUGES; AND JOSEPH MICHEL, PSC MINISTER OF INTERIOR, RE-ELECTED TO THE HOUSE FROM LUXEMBOURG PROVINCE.

7. SIGNIFICANT FOR THE AWARDING OF KEY PORTFOLIOS IN THE PROSPECTIVE NEW GOVERNMENT WERE THE RELATIVE PERFORMANCES OF PROMINANT CHRISTIAN PARTY POLITICIANS. TRANSPORT MINISTER JOSEPH CHABERT, WHO REPORTEDLY ASPIRES TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY IN THE SHORT RUN AND THE PREMIERSHIP AFTER TINDEMANS, WAS RUNAWAY WINNER OF THE BRUSSELS POPULARITY CONTEST (60,312 PREFERENCE VOTES). INCUMBENT FOREIGN MINISTER RENAAT VAN ELSLANDE HAD A SO-SO SCORE AND DEFENSE MINISTER PAUL VANDEN BOEYNANTS, NOW VISIBLY MOVING INTO THE ELDER-STATESMAN CATEGORY, AGAIN SAW HIS PREFERENCE-VOTE TOTAL SHRINK. PAUL DE KEERSMAEKER, WHO ALSO ASPIRES TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, MADE A STRONG SHOWING IN BRUSSELS. AND ECONOMICS MINISTER FERNAND HERMAN, MAKING HIS FIRST RUN FOR PUBLIC OFFICE, RAN WELL AND WILL SIT IN THE NEW SENATE. RENNER

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